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Synopses of Important Articles.

PAUL'S CONCEPTION OF CHRISTIANITY. V. THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS —
ITS AIM. By REV. PROFESSOR A. B. BRUCE, D.D., in *The Expositor*
for May, 1893.

The traditional opinion that Paul had no other desire or purpose in writing this epistle than to draw up an adequate statement of the Christian faith does not accord with the historical spirit of modern exegesis. What the precise situation was it may be difficult, or even impossible, to determine. The letter certainly deals with a phase of the Judaistic controversy, and *a priori* one could tell that it would be that phase not yet considered in the other controversial epistles, viz., the prerogative or primary of Israel. In the then existing condition this question must inevitably come up for discussion. If the Judaists could not nip Christianity in the bud by compelling Gentile converts to comply with Jewish customs, nor cripple the movement by assailing Paul's apostleship and character, the only course open would be to enter a protest in the name of the elect people, and pronounce the evangelization of the Gentiles a wrong done to Israel. It is to such a temper that Paul addresses himself in chapters 9–11. Being a man of Christlike spirit, he could not treat it with silent contempt. He would do his utmost to prevent a chronic alienation from issuing in ultimate separation. The disaffected party must be treated in the kindest spirit. Hence the absence of a controversial tone in this letter, and its broad comprehensive method. The famous chapters just referred to do not form the kernel of the epistle, as Baur held, nor an appendix, as the dogmatists teach, but an integral part of one great whole. The first eight chapters deal with the larger, more general claims of Christianity; the next three deal with the less important, narrower question as to the real value of Israel's claim. Both sections are essential to the apostle's purpose and course of thought. What he says is this: "Christianity is a universal religion. It is needed by the world at large, by Gentiles and by Jews alike; for both heathenism and Judaism, judged by their practical results, are failures. Christianity is not a failure. It solves the problem aimed at by all religion; brings men into blessed relations with God, and makes them really righteous. Christianity, therefore, must have free course: no prescriptive rights can be allowed to stand in its way. As for the Jewish people, I am heartily sorry for them. They are my countrymen, they are also God's people. But their right is not absolute, and they deserve to forfeit it. Yet I do not believe they are

permanently doomed to forfeiture. God will continue to love them, and in the course of his beneficent providence will give effect to their claims in a way compatible with Christian universalism and with Gentile interests." Were the Judaistic tendencies the real though hidden foe which Paul antagonized, to be found within the church of Rome, or without, and threatening to invade that church; or merely in Paul's own mind, prompt to conceive new possible forms of antagonism, or to find solutions of all religious problems arising out of the Pauline conception of Christianity? All three views have found influential advocates. The third, advocated by Weiss, seems hardly probable, as one fails to see why he should trouble others with his thoughts on the comparatively speculative topic of the prerogatives of Israel, if nobody was stirring the question. If, as seems probable, the membership of the Roman Church was mainly of Gentile extraction, how natural that men connected with the Judaistic propagandism should regard with envy and chagrin a flourishing Christian community in the capital of the empire! What more likely than that they should make a desperate attempt to win this church over to their side. If such a fact came to the apostle's knowledge it may have determined him on writing the epistle as a means of frustrating, by anticipation, the sinister scheme. Whatever may have been the composition of the membership, mainly Gentile or mainly Jewish, the one thing indispensable is to grasp firmly the fact that the epistle was meant to deal with Jewish jealousy awakened by the progress of Gentile evangelization; and that the Roman Church was in some way connected with it may be inferred from the simple fact of the epistle, which handles the topic, being addressed to it. Subordinate ends the writer doubtless had, such as the one arising out of his mission plans,—making Rome the natural base of operations for a visit to Western Europe. Nor is it an altogether idle fancy that in composing this remarkable letter the apostle's mind was influenced by the thought that he was writing to a church having its seat in *Rome*. The epistle is truly imperial in style. It breathes a spirit of truly imperial ambition. The writer aspires to the conquest of the world. He believes in no unconquerable enemies. He will have all men be saved, all peoples reconciled to God and to one another; Jew and Gentile united in a common brotherhood, and living peaceably together under the benign rule of King Jesus.

P. A. N.

PAUL'S CONCEPTION OF CHRISTIANITY: VI. THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS—THE TRAIN OF THOUGHT. By REV. PROFESSOR A. B. BRUCE, D.D., in *The Expositor* for June, 1893.

The theme of the first eight chapters is "the gospel of God," for the whole world, needed by all men, available for all who will receive it in the obedience of faith, and thoroughly efficient in the case of all who so receive it. The apostle enters at once on an explanation of the nature of this gospel. "Therein is revealed a righteousness of God from faith to faith." Two

things are indicated in this Pauline expression,—that the gospel is saving through *faith*, and that it is a *universal* gospel. Having proclaimed that salvation is of faith, the apostle shuts up all men to faith by demonstrating the universality of sin. The repulsive picture of human depravity presented in this section (chaps. 1:18–3:20) is necessary to the argument, for if sin be universal, if all distinctions disappear in the presence of the one all-embracing category, *sinners*, then there is no reason why the way to God's grace should not be equally open to all. But in order to make men feel the need of this grace, it was necessary to call forth the slumbering conscience into vigorous action by an unshrinking portrayal of the abominable vices practiced among the Gentiles. But the indictment against the Jews presents a more delicate task, for here the apostle deals with those who regard themselves as righteous. Therefore he begins with a statement amounting to a charge of hypocrisy, for he tells the Jews that in all essential points they are like the Gentiles, adding to it all the sin of hypocritical censoriousness. In this section Paul proves not simply that the Gentiles and the Jews are great sinners, but that they are such in spite of all in their respective religions that tended to keep them in the right way. He pronounces a verdict not merely on men, but on systems. Both Paganism and Judaism are failures. The pagans had light, but were not faithful to it. The Jews had still more light, and were just on that account the more to be blamed for their misconduct.

Having reached this negative conclusion, he now proceeds to state his positive doctrine of salvation (chaps. 3:21–26). By "the righteousness of God," which is the burden of this epistle, he means a righteousness which God gives to those who believe in Jesus. Great stress is laid on the fact that this righteousness is revealed apart from law, yet law is by no means undervalued or made void, but rather established. In chaps. 4 and 5 a three-fold support to the doctrine of justification by faith is drawn (a) from the history of Abraham (chap. 4); (b) from the experience of the justified (5:1–11); (c) from the history of the human race (5:12–21). Abraham is no exception to the rule that no man is justified by works. His case is in all respects typical. The experience of the justified is one of constant and many-sided exaltation. In respect to the human race it is shown that as sin and death came by one man, so salvation comes through faith in Christ. The law could do nothing to help sin and death-stricken humanity, but rather entered that sin might abound.

Just here Christianity runs the risk of becoming an even more tragic failure than Paganism or Judaism. These, judged by their practical fruits, are found wanting. Can the new religion stand the test? Obviously it must be a matter of life and death for Paul to show that the gospel he preaches will stand it. This is the task he undertakes in chaps. 6–8. Three questions naturally suggest themselves. Since the great matter seems to be that grace

abound, had we not better then all play Adam's part, that grace may have free scope? If the law, given to make sin abound, gives place to grace, are we not at liberty to do deeds contrary to the law? If the function of law was to increase sin, is not the law itself sin? The thought in the first question is abhorrent, since, ideally viewed, a Christian is a man dead to sin and alive in, and with, Christ. The second question is boldly met by the assertion that just because we are not under law, but under grace, therefore sin shall not have dominion over us. This leads to a discussion of the function of law which is illustrated under the figure of a marriage. The fruit of marriage to the law is death, but this is merely a re-statement of his doctrine that the law entered to make sin abound. This doctrine he must now explain and defend in answer to the third question, which he does in one of the most remarkable passages in all his writings, wherein he describes the conflict between the flesh and the spirit, and the function of the law in provoking sin, while holy in itself, through the flesh. It is altogether a very sombre and depressing utterance, ending with the cry of despair: "Wretched man, who shall deliver me!"

The exposition of the gospel cannot so end. That would be to confess failure. "Thanks to God through Jesus Christ"—must be made the starting point of a new strain, in which despair shall give place to hope, and struggle to victory. This is what happens in chap. 8. The apostle returns to the happy mood of chap. 5:1-11. In this earlier place the ground of joy is *objective*, the righteousness of God given to faith; in the latter place it is *subjective*, union to Christ by faith, having Christ's spirit dwelling in us. On eagle wing Paul soars away toward heaven. But such flights seldom last long. That which brings his spirit back from heaven to earth is the prevailing unbelief of his countrymen. This not only grieved him, but raised an important apologetic problem. The apostle's solution, as given in chaps. 9-11, is reserved for a future occasion.

The above papers, continuing Professor Bruce's valuable series of articles on Paulinism, are very helpful in following the apostle's close train of reasoning in the first eight chapters of the Epistle to the Romans. Some of the minor links in the chain are not touched, but the student can easily discover the connection for himself.

P. A. N.